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ABSTRACT

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health created the School of the Future (SoF) project to enable selected Texas schools to coordinate and implement school-based social and health services on their campuses and to demonstrate the effectiveness of this method of service delivery by evaluating the project. The projects, each of which involved a middle school and one or two feeder elementary schools, were organized in low-income urban areas. In Austin the chosen site was in a new, recently developed, working-class neighborhood, where residents, although low-income, did not qualify for public assistance. Because there were few community resources, neighbors turned to the schools for help. This report focuses on the Austin experience and the preschool and parenting programs associated with the school. Three major programs are based in one school or the other: (1) Parents as Teachers, a parent education program for first-time parents with young children; (2) Head Start; and (3) the Widen Health Center. A fourth program, a family resource center, serves the same population from a community rather than a school base. An unusual aspect of the SoF program in Austin is that, as funding from the Hogg Foundation comes to an end, no single service or group has tried to take over the project. Instead, it is continuing with a collaboration of schools, independent agencies, and concerned residents. In this way, the program represents genuine community strength. (SLD)

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A COMMUNITY CATALYST

AUSTIN

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A COMMUNITY CATALYST

SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE

AUSTIN

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1995

PREFACE

When the Hogg Foundation was looking for a pilot site in Austin for its new School of the Future project, it selected schools in an area that was in great need of help—Dove Springs. The neighborhood was new, isolated, and suffering from a downturn in the economy that had left many of its residents without jobs and the means to maintain their homes. As a result, there was an increase in family stress and community problems including school dropouts, teen pregnancies, and crime.

This was a community of proud working people whose family incomes were low but who did not qualify for public assistance programs. Because there were no community resources, neighborhood residents turned to the schools for help. Though the problems were acknowledged by concerned school staff, their ability to respond was limited.

The School of the Future's initial goal was to bring services to the schools to help better the lives of students and their families. With the support of the school principals, we were able to learn what the local families perceived as their primary needs, then were able to bring resources into the schools to help meet those needs.

From the beginning, collaboration with community service providers has been the cornerstone of the project. Services have been developed and located at the school sites through the cooperation and involvement of human service agencies and volunteers. The development of services and programs required a more creative approach, finding and using new and untapped community resources. Several of our programs—the Roving Leader program, Méndez Peer Mediation Program, Head Start, and Parents As Teachers—are examples of that creative approach.

With the collaboration and help of school administrators, community leaders, and parents, the School of the Future has been able to play an important role in the development of community services. This booklet describes how it all came about.

Marilyn Rangel
Coordinator
School of the Future, Austin

INTRODUCTION

In Summer 1990, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health initiated the School of the Future project. The concept is to provide an integrated array of health and social services in public schools in an effort to prevent some of the problems and better the lives of children in low-income areas and their families. One unusual aspect of the project is that a coordinator serves a cluster of schools to assess needs and arrange services, freeing teachers to focus on teaching. Another is that a longitudinal evaluation component is built in to document the project's process and outcomes in order to provide the accountability necessary for determining the most effective methods of helping young Texans.

Since the program began almost five years ago, each of the four pilot sites—Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio—has integrated a number of different programs on its campuses to meet the particular needs of its community. It is too early to determine the long-range benefits of these efforts, but it is not too early to describe some of the key programs at each site to show how the School of the Future has been developing and the impact it is having in the schools and on the students and their families.

This is the fourth in a series of reports highlighting a major program or focus at each of the project sites. The first report focused on San Antonio and its exemplary Parent Volunteer Program, the second on Dallas and its unique "one-stop shopping center" for a variety of health and social services. The third report featured the health clinic located at the Houston site's middle school. This report concentrates on Austin and its preschool and parenting programs, not only looking at how these initiatives are working on the campuses but also, and perhaps more importantly, at how the project is playing a catalytic role in community development.

Hogg Foundation funding for the School of the Future will conclude in the summer of 1995. Two of the sites—Dallas and Houston—have been assured continued funding through their school districts, and efforts are underway to obtain funds through a combination of public and private resources for at least one additional year at the other two sites. In Austin, collaboration has been an integral part of this school-based initiative. It is a sign of the School of the Future's acceptance and value that the schools and the community are collaborating now in their efforts to continue the project.

Wayne H. Holtzman
Special Counsel, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

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Pleasant Valley Road winds through the southeast corner of the city of Austin, passing street after street of small tract houses not unlike others built in subdivisions throughout the city in the 1970s. To the casual passer-by the road may indeed live up to its name. Just below the surface, however, a far different scene appears. If the area of town called Dove Springs is known for anything by the rest of the city, it is known for gangs, drugs, and drive-by shootings. Local residents know the area for these things, too. They struggle with these problems and more.

One bright spot has emerged on Pleasant Valley Road. Méndez Middle School, which fronts the road, and Widen Elementary School across the street, with their bright blue roofs and clean white buildings stand out from the rest of the community. Here, too, there is more than meets the eye, but in this case it is something positive. What is not visible to a passerby is that these schools form an educational complex that is becoming known to local residents as a safe haven in an unsafe area, a resource in an area lacking in resources, a center for community growth in an area that had never developed a sense of community. The catalyst for bringing about these changes is a project called the School of the Future.

From Awareness to Action

A Growing Awareness

Change comes slowly to a community and sometimes only with help. In 1990, Dove Springs' residents were becoming increasingly alarmed about the rising crime rate in their neighborhood. School personnel were equally alarmed; they recognized but were unable to meet the extensive health and social service needs of their students, needs which interfered with teaching and detracted from learning. The city, meanwhile, was only beginning to become aware that the area lacked amenities that were standard in other parts of town—basic amenities such as a library, a recreation center, and a swimming pool. Working independently, however, no one group had been able to obtain the funds or the support required to bring about the needed changes.

That same year, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health was initiating a new project. Called the School of the Future, it was designed to prevent some of today's common problems—drug abuse, school dropouts, teen pregnancy—and to improve the potential for academic success for young children at risk and their families by bringing together an array of health and social services on school campuses. The unique aspect was to have a project coordinator at each site, a social worker or educator who would be responsible for determining needs, planning programs, working with school administrators and teachers, and establishing links with local service agencies. From the start the Foundation viewed the project as extending beyond one organization's efforts, calling for a constructive partnership between local public and private human service agencies, public school systems, parents, and the community—all key players in the lives of young children.

To demonstrate the effectiveness of this coordinated approach to school-based services, the Foundation selected as test sites a middle

school and one or two feeder elementary schools in low-income neighborhoods in four Texas cities—Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. It set aside one million dollars to support the project—$50,000 per site per year for five years. Additionally, it earmarked an equal amount for an extensive quantitative and qualitative evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the various interventions, their interactions, and their impact on the community.

In Austin, Widen and Méndez schools in the Dove Springs community were designated as the pilot site.

THE COMMUNITY

Unlike most low-income areas, Dove Springs is not an old, decaying neighborhood nor are its schools antiquated and rundown. In fact, the area was developed in the 1970s to provide moderately priced housing for employed, upwardly mobile, and primarily first-time home owners. The schools, built in 1986 and 1987, are among the newest in the city. The neighborhood was naturally integrated, with about 45 percent of the families Hispanic, 25 percent African American, and 30 percent Anglo. Most of the initial residents had viewed their move as an upward one from the city's east side or as a convenient one for employees of a nearby Air Force base.

The economic downturn and resulting lack of employment in the 1980s, however, turned an area of proudly owned, single-family homes into one of multiple-family dwellings or rental units and a stable working population into one of high unemployment and high turnover. By 1990, almost 75 percent of the families had lived in the area less than six years, more than 40 percent less than two; unemployment was about 15 percent; and families were young, with at least one-third of the children of preschool age and an equal percent ages six through ten. About 75 percent of the children qualified for free lunch, a figure that remains constant.

Isolation from extended families, who for the most part had

remained in older parts of the city and thus were unable to help with such tasks as child care, compounded the problems. So, too, did isolation from city facilities. Initially, in fact, the area was cut off literally from the main part of the city by an expressway, but that problem was remedied in time by the construction of an exit ramp and bridge. However, the financial crisis of the 1980s put a moratorium on municipal development. Apart from the schools, virtually no other amenities or services, public or private, were developed. As one volunteer said when trying to document existing services, "I didn't make a list of services that were available in the area; I just documented what wasn't there."

That was the status of the community when the School of the Future (SoF) project began.

THE DIRECTION AND THE TASK

Because the community was new, isolated, and highly mobile, little was known about the needs of the neighborhood. Thus, the SoF's first task was to survey local families to learn what was most important to them, to find what services "not there" that they considered most urgently needed. According to the survey, residents were in complete accord: the major needs were for a recreation center, a swimming pool, and supervised activities for children. Parents with young children—and that defined a large majority of the families—also pointed out the need for child care, and more than three-fourths wanted accessible and affordable health care and adult education through the schools. In fact, even before the advent of the SoF, the schools were beginning to develop a reputation as a neighborhood resource. A mentoring program, a peer leadership program, and a few other nonacademic initiatives were in place, and teachers were looked to for information and help.

Teachers and other neighborhood professionals and leaders who were queried in a separate survey reinforced the families' concerns. They viewed lack of supervision of young children as a major prob-

lem. Whether this was due to parents working more than one job or the fact that a large number of parents were young, single, and had little knowledge of parenting, the result was that young children were at home taking care of even younger siblings or on the streets fending for themselves.

The needs and status of the community dictated the direction that the Austin School of the Future should take. In a community virtually devoid of services, that meant building from the ground up. It meant working with schools and service agencies, traditionally independent entities that worked only on their own turf, to bring them together not only physically on school campuses but also in their planning and providing for the children they served. Beyond that, it also meant helping a relatively new and troubled neighborhood develop a sense of community and its families a sense of empowerment. This was the somewhat daunting task facing the SoF project coordinator, Marilyn Rangel.

TAKING ACTION

Rangel, herself a product of the Austin schools as well as knowledgable about the Austin Independent School District (AISD) from the perspective of an involved parent, wasted no time in getting started. First she conferred with Lucy Diaz Duncan, principal of Widen since it opened and a supporter of school-based services. Duncan, recognizing that Rangel could develop credibility in the community more readily from a school base, provided the coordinator with an office adjacent to her own in the elementary school. From this base, which was just a quick walk from the middle school across the street, Rangel met with and made presentations about the SoF to school staff and parents, and with the full support of the principals, she quickly became an accepted and involved staff member of both schools. She also reached out to the community, speaking to local neighborhood and church groups about the SoF and forming a community advisory committee so that neighborhood leaders could play an active role in the project. From the beginning, Rangel also

contacted agencies and service providers to pique their interest in bringing their services to the schools.

The first SoF effort was a Community Health Fair. In this neighborhood that had not yet become a community, more than 100 families attended the event. They learned about programs that might help their children, they got free immunizations for their preschoolers and other family members, and, as a bonus, they met and visited with one another, many for the first time, in a comfortable and accepting setting. For the most part they were unaware of the extensive collaborative efforts that had gone on behind the scenes to enable this event to take place, efforts ranging from obtaining the use of Méndez Middle School to getting the commitment of the many organizations, from small agencies to the City Health Department, to have staff members and handouts and free services on hand.

The health fair set the pattern for the School of the Future as community catalyst. As project coordinator, Rangel was at the helm, making essential contacts and working out the logistics, but she made sure that nothing was perceived as her project or exclusively a project of the SoF. Rather, she promoted school-based efforts as benefits to the larger community, from the beginning encouraging input and support from neighborhood leaders, school personnel, and parents; giving local groups a chance to showcase their services; and inviting the residents of Dove Springs to participate with no strings attached.

Other collaborative school and community efforts followed. To address the neighborhood's concern about violence, especially among teenagers, the SoF worked with a local attorney and professional mediator to start a Peer Mediation Program at the middle school. The attorney volunteered his time, and the SoF coordinator made the necessary arrangements so that he could come on campus to instruct seventh- and eighth-grade students at Méndez in the use of mediation and negotiation techniques.

To address the need for recreational activities and gang prevention, Rangel worked with another attorney, this one a local resident and

member of both the SoF Community Advisory Committee and a nearby Methodist Church. A year of outreach and negotiations followed in which the attorney and his wife brought their community's needs not only to the attention of their own church but also to the attention of others throughout the city in an appeal for funds. The result was a Roving Leader Program, with the churches providing the funds, the school providing the use of the gym and a small office, and the SoF coordinator working out the many details and arrangements needed to make the program possible.

The Roving Leader, in the person of a young Hispanic social worker, started biweekly evening basketball games that are open to all middle school students who want to participate, a program that was an immediate success. He also conducts other supervised recreation activities, and keeps his door open throughout the day for youngsters to drop in for counseling and support.

To meet the needs for parent education and support, Rangel brought several programs to the schools. "Cara y Corazon" is an education and support group for Spanish-speaking parents, especially designed to help recent immigrants, a growing population in Dove Springs, retain the best parts of their culture as well as understand the American culture in which their children are growing up. "Harambe" is a family support program designed to help African-American parents identify the strengths of their culture and use those strengths to help their children with problem solving and decision making.

Legal Aid is a school-based service for the entire community. Held at Méndez Middle School one night a week, it is available without cost to any Dove Springs' family in need of legal advice and guidance. Here, too, collaboration is the key. Students in the middle school's life skills classes baby sit for the families in Legal Aid, helping the families and at the same time obtaining class and community service credit as well as an introduction to the law. The life skills teacher supervises the students and Rangel coordinates volunteers to serve as translators and handles the logistics involved in the use of school facilities by an outside organization.

A CATALYST FOR SERVICES

. . . IN THE SCHOOLS

A prime example of how the School of the Future and the community are collaborating to better the lives of Dove Springs' children is in their efforts on behalf of preschoolers. These are the youngsters who will be in the public schools and in the work force—or on the streets and in the jails—in the first decades of the next century. These are the youngsters who today account for seven prekindergarten and eight kindergarten classes at Widen Elementary School, almost one-fourth of the school's 1,000 students. By providing a continuum of services for children from birth through middle-school age and their parents, the Austin SoF is striving to turn around the negative statistics emanating from the schools by helping today's preschoolers successfully incorporate the schools and the work force in their future.

The list of health and social services at Widen and Méndez schools for preschoolers and their parents was blank before the advent of the School of the Future. Today, three major programs are based in one school or the other: Parents As Teachers (PAT), Head Start, and the Widen Health Center. A fourth, the CEDEN Family Resource Center's Healthy and Fair Start program, serves the same population from a community rather than a school base.

Each of the school-based programs differs in its primary emphasis and approach. Parents As Teachers focuses on parenting education and support as well as infant developmental assessments; Head Start is an early childhood education program with parent involvement and health components; and the Health Center's primary goal is preventive health care, which includes counseling and parent education.

CEDEN is similar to PAT in that it, too, provides parenting education

and infant evaluations, and the large population it serves includes the families with children in Widen and Méndez. As a community-based program, it also exemplifies how the SoF has created a climate that encourages and enables agencies to come into the community, work cooperatively with the schools, and be accepted by neighborhood residents, a climate that as recently as five years ago did not exist.

Following is a description of these programs and their mechanisms of collaboration—how they share resources, how they coordinate their planning and efforts with one another on behalf of the population they serve, and how these changes came about.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Dawn Leach walked into the room and put down her "briefcase," a large bag with two dolls peering out of the outside pocket, the inside stuffed with toys, books, and other tools of her trade. One of two parent educators with the Parents As Teachers (PAT) program, she had just been to see a teen mother. The girl had resisted home visits for some time, but Dawn hadn't pushed her; she just kept communication open whenever the girl dropped by the PAT office. Then, one day the girl had walked in, looked at her little boy, and said, "Sam, do you want someone to come visit?" "Who?" asked the child. "Her," said the mother, pointing at Dawn. With Sam's approval, Dawn had just made her first home visit.

Parents As Teachers is a parent education program for first-time parents with children from birth to age five. Based on the concept that parents are their children's first teachers, the program provides trained parent educators who work with families in their homes, offering parenting education and support, screening infants and young children for developmental delays, and making referrals to social service agencies as warranted for additional help. In addition, group meetings are held monthly in the program's room at Widen Elementary School, where parents can learn about child develop-

ment, visit with one another, and check out toys, books, and videos for their children from the toy lending library.

Before the program began, "there was nothing out here," according to Shirley Kelly, PAT coordinator and parent educator at Widen. "But Marilyn Rangel's survey showed that the families wanted help for their little ones." Help became available through the Mental Health Association in Texas (MHAT), which itself had been the catalyst for a collaborative multi-agency effort that had led to legislation creating the Texas Children's Mental Health Plan. Primarily designed to provide services statewide for children with handicapping conditions and/or delayed development, the plan had earmarked a small amount of its state-appropriated funds for prevention and early intervention, specifying a portion of that prevention money for Parents as Teachers.

To make the best use of those funds, the Mental Health Association, which coordinates PAT throughout Texas, sought proposals from schools interested in starting a program. Based on a proposal submitted by the School of Future, and recognizing the strides made in coordinating social services at the SoF site, MHAT selected Widen Elementary as one of two schools in Austin to receive a PAT grant.

The first problem the program faced was finding space. Widen is the largest elementary school in Austin, serving its 1,000 or more students in a facility built for 750. Together, Rangel and the principal studied the school's floorplan, finally deciding to install PAT in the counselor's office and move the counselor into the SoF office. "We figured the SoF coordinator could move into a corner somewhere," they agreed.

After six months of planning, the program began serving families in the fall of 1992. The educators—Kelly, a former preschool teacher with a degree in child development, and Leach, with an education degree and a background in nursery school curricula—each work half time. It is obvious that they love their work. "When I was hired," notes Kelly, "I said, 'you mean you get paid for this?' It's

ONE MOTHER'S STORY

"Hello, Juana. I just called to say hi and see how you're doing." For Shirley Kelly, parent educator, the phone call was one of several she made that day to welcome parents of students new to Widen Elementary School. For this mother, the call was more special. To her it said "She remembers me." And for someone new to Austin, recently divorced, and far from family and friends, "It was nice to get a phone call. It feels good to be remembered."

That call was Juana's introduction to the School of the Future and one of its major programs at Widen, Parents As Teachers (PAT). "When I got involved, it was neat," she says. She liked the monthly meetings where the group made her feel welcome and she could meet and talk to other parents, and she liked the home visits where she could talk to the parent educator about her children and learn about child development. Juana had participated in parenting classes in San Marcos and San Antonio, where she had lived previously. She knew about abuse and the bad effect it had on young children, and she knew that parents had to teach their children to talk and to play. But she didn't know about child development and its importance. "I would say to Shirley and Dawn (the other parent educator), "Can you translate 'motor development' and 'social development'? I had to get used to the language; I'd never thought of it that way."

Juana's interest in helping young children began when she was a nine-year-old growing up in Mexico. There she had seen her neighbor, a boy about her age, care for his younger brothers and sisters until he got sick. Then there was no one to care for him or his siblings. Although she tried to help, there was little she could do. "I would see him sitting on a rock, not able to do anything, no longer

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able to help his family. And his family wasn't able to help him. I've wanted to help kids ever since."

Last year, the PAT staff encouraged Juana to apply for an AmeriCorps grant so that she could earn pay for her work with children as well as potential funds for furthering her education. The application was long but she persevered, and she was selected. As an AmeriCorps member, Juana now serves on the staff of Parents As Teachers. She goes on home visits, working with the children while the parent educator talks with the parents and translating for the parents who speak only Spanish. She is becoming skilled at suggesting things for a parent to do to help a child who is delayed in gross motor skills, for example, or language development. "We have to give the mother ideas without making her feel bad," Juana points out. "Sometimes it's frustrating. You need a lot of patience so that they will understand and accept what you are telling them."

While some visits are frustrating, many are rewarding. She enjoys helping the newly arrived Spanish-speaking families, calling them frequently because "I know how it feels to be alone in a strange place." And she enjoys the success stories. At the top of her list is a family in which, although the parents speak no English, six of their seven children are in English-speaking classes and doing well. She credits the mother—"she is very encouraging, very supportive and loving"—but Juana and PAT also deserve credit.

Recently she began "helping kids" in another way, working with two-year-olds every afternoon from three to six in a nearby child care center. Her children all go with her, the older ones to the after-school program. They love it, she says, adding that she's never left them, either alone or with a sitter. As she says, "They're my main job now. They grow up so fast."

Juana is proud of her three children. Her nine-year-old daughter is on the honor role, her seven-year-old son is doing well in first grade, and her youngest is off to a good start in prekindergarten. "I didn't have a chance for much schooling when I was young," Juana notes,

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"and seeing my kids do well is a good feeling."

Through AmeriCorps, Juana is going to have the chance she never had before. With the funds the program sets aside for tuition, she plans to begin classes at Austin Community College, where she will study child development. In time, she hopes to earn a degree in early childhood education.

For Juana, Parents As Teachers has become more than a welcoming group and help with her children. It has also led to the beginning of a career and the fulfillment of a dream.

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wonderful sharing your knowledge and working with families."

The small staff is supplemented by two AmeriCorps workers, both parents of Widen students and former participants in the PAT program. They assist with home visits and community outreach, work with teen parents, and help with weekly preschool learning sessions for parents and children. One of the women also serves as a translator when Spanish language skills are needed.

PAT serves parents of students at Widen and Houston elementary schools and teenage parents at Méndez, a total of 50 families. Most are intact families; even the teens are together, if not married, according to Kelly. Some are families whose income makes them ineligible for the school's prekindergarten classes or the Head Start program, yet they are unable to afford private child care, leaving them with no other developmental or educational support. Referrals come from the Teenage Parent Council, the health fair, PTA meetings at which preschoolers perform, the Widen Health Center, and word of mouth from participating families. As Kelly points out, this is a volunteer program, and not all parents are interested. "The program attracts parents wanting to do their best," she says. "All they need is an hour a month."

In addition to their home- and center-based activities, PAT reaches out to the community, presenting bilingual story time at the Dove Springs Library and preschool programs at the recreation center. For a year it conducted a weekly program for preschoolers and their parents from 2 to 2:45 p.m., the time period between the end of prekindergarten classes and the close of day for the rest of the school. However, the portable building they had been using was needed by an academic program, so the program is on hold until space can be found. PAT also serves as a center—a very crowded one, due to limited space— for donated clothing and baby equipment that is available for families in need.

Although it is an independent program that reports to its funding source, the Mental Health Association in Texas, PAT coordinates

plans and activities with both the school and the community. In the school, Kelly and Leach work closely with prekindergarten teachers, who serve many of the same families, and with the Widen Health Center across the hall. They serve on the Parent Involvement Team, conduct training at a local day care center and baby sitting classes for the Parks and Recreation Department, and make their book and toy libraries available for students from life skills classes at Méndez. And they have developed a reputation for being helpful. "When the preschool teachers came to me and said they needed to learn CPR," says Rangel by way of example, "the parent educators provided the training."

In the community, PAT coordinates with CEDEN's Healthy and Fair Start Program. The parent educators recommend CEDEN's parenting classes to families they are working with and, when appropriate, refer parents to that organization's Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program for children at risk of developmental delay.

All of PAT's activities are possible because "the principal is very supportive," says Kelly. "She lets us do our own thing." Principal Duncan agrees. "We provide the space and sign off on the budget, but they do their own training and they keep me informed." "We're a part of the school," the parent educators are quick to point out.

HEAD START

The School of the Future was new to Mike Perez when he became principal of Méndez in 1993, but he quickly learned that the project's philosophy and goals were in accord with his views—that "if kids are not physically well and mentally well, they won't be able to do well in school." Among his early goals were to find ways to get children off to a good start and to get rid of the negative image of his school. An opportunity for accomplishing both came when, at the first SoF collaboration meeting he attended, he met Milton McQuage of Child Inc.

Child Inc., the federal Head Start program grantee in Austin, had been trying to find a site in Dove Springs for the preschool program for several years. No space was available at Widen and little was available elsewhere in the area; when it was, obstacles such as zoning prevented its use.

The meeting revealed a perfect match: Head Start needed space; Perez had the space and wanted a positive way to bring parents to the middle school. Extensive negotiations followed among the school district, the city, and Child Inc., with Rangel facilitating the process. What evolved was a collaborative model in which the school district provided the land, Child Inc. managed the complex process of securing a portable building, the city purchased the building, and Head Start runs the program. And parents who deliver and pick up their children learn that the school is a friendly and welcoming place.

Head Start in Austin is unusual in that it is a full-day, full-year program. At Méndez it has the added distinction of primarily serving children who live in the area. It offers a developmentally appropriate curriculum, provides breakfast and lunch, and conducts a developmental screening for every child, following up or referring families to specific services as needed. It also stresses parent involvement, requiring parents to volunteer in the program for four hours per month, per child. The program is an optional one: for children who meet age and income eligibility requirements, families can select Head Start as an alternative to the public school's kindergarten and prekindergarten programs.

The location of Head Start on a middle school campus is unique in the Austin area, but it is not inappropriate. McQuage explains that although the program serves children ages three through five, it tracks its former participants up to age eight, reaches out to older siblings, and permits families to come to parenting meetings even after their children are too old for the program. This expanded outreach recently has been incorporated into the program's guidelines.

The relationship between Child Inc. and the School of the Future is viewed as a plus by both groups. McQuage notes that the SoF, by bringing service programs on the campus, has "helped desensitize the environment," and he likes the fact that the school playground can be used by Head Start youngsters. Widen benefits by gaining three teachers aides, provided by Child Inc. to help in the prekindergarten classes. This extra help permits the classes to enroll a few more students than regulations would allow under only one teacher and also enables more home visits and follow-up interventions to take place. And Principal Perez is pleased that the teachers not only are friendly but also are trained to help parents, and especially fathers, feel at home, which helps the school's image.

For the success of this effort, McQuage credits Perez with being professionally and personally secure enough to collaborate and to be willing to have others on his campus. From Perez' perspective, "It all went together like cogs in a wheel." The reason it did, they agree, is that the SoF coordinator facilitated the entire process.

WIDEN HEALTH CENTER

The Health Center provides another facet in the comprehensive services for students at Widen Elementary School and their families. A coordinated project of the AISD and the City of Austin, it grew out of a proposal to provide health services in the schools to children from low-income families. The sponsoring organizations did not work alone; behind them were the SoF as catalyst and the community residents who emerged as leaders, attending school board meetings to explain the concerns and needs of area residents and to voice their support for the project. Discussions were lengthy; controversial issues were argued and negotiations were extensive. Finally, following a year of collaborative efforts of the SoF Health Committee and the Austin/Travis County Health Department, the City of Austin in 1993 opened two elementary school-based health centers, one at Widen and one at Zavala.

The Widen Health Center is housed in a former office on the school's main hallway, its central location making it easily accessible for students, their families, and school staff. A nurse and a social worker—Ann Hughes, R.N., and Marina Morales, LMSW—form the center's staff. Both are quick to point out that this is a center, not a clinic. That distinction, in fact, was one of the agreements reached in the negotiations. What it means is that no physician is on staff and no medical problems can be treated that would require a physician to handle them. Instead, the emphasis is on preventive health care and social service support to the students. Parental permission is required before a child can receive services of any kind.

A summary of cases seen in 1994 exemplifies the center's activities: well child exams for more than 200 Widen students, immunizations for students and their younger siblings, and case management for about 75, referring and linking them and their families to a variety of social and health services.

In their team approach to reaching students and families, Hughes and Morales have tried a number of innovative approaches. One is Coffee Talk, a program that reaches out to parents in the early morning when they drop their children off at school. With coffee and sweet rolls to attract them and free baby sitting to make their visits possible, parents get a chance to meet the principal, the nurse, and other school staff informally and to ask them questions about their children's health and education. Another innovation is Girl Talk, an after-school discussion and support group for fourth- and fifth-grade girls who seem isolated or in need of extra help. There is also a self-esteem group for kindergarten families, held to help parents with their youngsters' transition to first grade.

Although their primary focus is on school children, the health center's nurse and social worker estimate that about 20 percent of the children they see are the students' younger siblings. They consider this a positive note, for it enables them to provide immunizations and other preventive health care and education rather than wait to contend with more severe problems when these youngsters enter school.

Both staff members have worked in other settings, and they appreciate the support they receive and the many resources available to them at Widen. "We have so much at our fingertips here that you don't have at most clinics," Hughes points out. "If a child has a behavior problem, I can walk around the partition and take him to Marina. If a child needs a mentor, I'll see Marilyn. If it's a preschooler with developmental delay, I can refer her to Parents As Teachers or to the CEDEN Healthy and Fair Start program. I appreciate the school-based service concept. I see it work."

One reason it works is that the principal is supportive. Duncan's approach is to have open communication with the staff and to listen to their ideas. If a suggested project seems to have potential and can be conducted within AISD regulations, she'll tell them to "go for it." Duncan and her staff agree that with support and trust, "it all seems to fall into place."

Another reason is the school staff's willingness to work together. All the key players in children's health and mental health problems—principal and assistant principal, school counselors, nurse, social worker, Roving Leader, and SoF coordinator—participate on the Student Affairs Committee (SAC). They meet weekly in the health center to confer about cases that teachers have referred during the week, and together they discuss ways to resolve them. Following the meetings, they report back to the respective teachers about the proposed resolutions.

A problem, for example, might concern a girl whose frequent headaches have been diagnosed as a need for eyeglasses. After a presentation of the case, the proposed resolution might be to help her obtain the prescribed glasses but also, on the basis of the child's history and the teacher's comments, to follow up on the possibility that family stress is adding to the problem. Another discussion might focus on the need to work with the parent of a child who often comes to school hungry and sleepy. It helps when one of the SAC members knows a child's family and can offer insight into what might be causing a problem or how the parent might be helped.

The SAC avoids duplication of services as well as enables a sharing of ideas, another advantage the health center staff find in having school-based services.

Along with PAT and Head Start, the Widen Health Center is a path for getting parents into the schools. Parents drop by to see the nurse, perhaps because a child's ear hurts or to talk about a family problem, perhaps just to visit. "It has taken two years to get parents to feel at ease," Hughes notes, but she and Morales are pleased that they have come this far. They are also pleased that teachers come in for help and to ask questions. "They turn physical and social problems over to us," the health team points out. "Then they can focus on teaching."

A CATALYST FOR SERVICES . . . IN THE COMMUNITY

"It takes a whole village to raise a child." This phrase may be overused today, but it continues to hold true, and perhaps nowhere is it better exemplified than in Dove Springs. Recognizing the need for community development and stabilization in conjunction with school-based services, the Austin School of the Future project from the beginning has extended beyond school boundaries to serve as a catalyst for community development. As the coordinator explains it, the concept of locating services on school sites is one strategy designed to improve students' educational performance, but community-wide strategies are necessary if most students are to be successful in school.

This was the basis for bringing the CEDEN Family Resource Center's Healthy and Fair Start program to the Dove Springs community.

CEDEN HEALTHY AND FAIR START PROGRAM

CEDEN offers the fourth program to serve parents and their infants and preschoolers in the area of southeast Austin. It differs from the others in that it is community rather than school based, but it owes its entrance into the neighborhood to the SoF, which has created a climate of acceptance to outside organizations and of awareness to both city and private funding sources. As a result of SoF's ongoing efforts, the school administrators have become more open to outside organizations. The city, in turn, has become more aware not only of the neighborhood's needs but also that an atmosphere is emerging in which local dollars can be used more effectively and efficiently. And, through participation in SoF programs, local families have become more trusting and accepting of new efforts brought into the community to help them.

CEDEN entered the Dove Springs neighborhood in early 1994. Its Healthy and Fair Start program, which is similar to a program it has conducted in East Austin for some 15 years, is designed to enhance parenting skills and help prevent developmental delays and child abuse. The center is located on Pleasant Valley Road at a convenient intersection about a mile south of the schools. It is housed in a small strip shopping center between a barber shop and a fast-food grocery, with cheerful quarters that were remodeled by the city according to the program's specifications.

The program is funded by the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department through grants from two local foundations. The department administers the funds, monitors the program, and helps insure coordination among the various providers it serves in Dove Springs. CEDEN's Healthy and Fair Start is unique in that it is the first funded program of The Austin Project, a major new effort initiated to improve the lives of Austin's low-income and minority children, youth, and young adults.

The program offers both home- and center-based services. Included in home visits are developmental assessments and information on parenting. Children who exhibit developmental delay are served by CEDEN's Early Childhood Intervention component at the agency's main offices or referred to other services, as appropriate. Among the activities at the center are parenting classes, parent support groups, and a toy lending library for neighborhood families and child care providers as well as program participants. The program also provides information, training, and educational materials for child care providers in the area.

In addition to the director, the staff includes a coordinator of prenatal education who works with volunteers and teens, and four service providers who make home visits and conduct developmental assessments. The program also trains volunteers, some of whom are bilingual and from the neighborhood, to make home visits. Currently, one AmeriCorps member also is working with the program.

Although its services and its clients are parallel to Parents As Teachers, its target population is far broader, extending beyond the boundaries of Widen and Méndez schools to all pregnant teens and women and to parents of children under age five living in the two zip code areas of southeast Austin. Mary Ellen Nudd, PAT coordinator for the Mental Health Association in Texas, doesn't consider the comparability of services a problem. "There are so many needy families in Dove Springs that similar programs don't trip over one another," she points out.

Terry Arguello, director of CEDEN's program in Dove Springs, agrees. "We fill the gap in services for early childhood," she says. "We step in where others don't provide services." Because the program initially was not known in the neighborhood, Arguello and her staff conducted extensive outreach by ringing doorbells, distributing flyers, and making presentations. The center's location, next to a popular barber shop and with a bus stop at the door, has increased the program's visibility.

By March 1995, one year after the program began, CEDEN had 120 families on its rolls who either were receiving services or going through an extensive intake process. Referrals come from a variety of service agencies, but the greatest number have been from the program's door-to-door survey, self-referrals, and friends. All services are voluntary. Staff members explain to families the developmental areas in which they should work with their children, but the families help decide the number and frequency of home visits they would prefer.

CEDEN works with other programs in the area primarily through the Dove Springs Collaboration Project, which is comprised of eight city-funded projects. Among the schools in southeast Austin, Arguello finds Widen the easiest to work with, noting that the principal is willing to accept social services and helps provide access to prekindergarten and kindergarten families. "Widen is very open to what we do," she says. "They include us in their objectives." Arguello serves on the advisory board of School-Based Health Services, of which the Widen Health Center is a component, and her agency has conducted parenting classes in the school.

NEIGHBORHOOD AMENITIES

The SoF efforts in the community date back to the neighborhood needs assessment survey it conducted in 1991. A key question was, "What one thing would you like to see happen in this community to help you and your family?" Local residents left no doubt about what they wanted most for their children and youth and had been trying, unsuccessfully, to get: a community swimming pool and a recreation center.

With increasing citywide concern about the area, backed by the active support of the School of the Future and of the residents themselves, that wish has become a reality. In summer 1994, an Olympic-

size swimming pool and park, funded by the city's Parks and Recreation Department, opened across the field from Widen Elementary School. And a few blocks north of the schools on Pleasant Valley road, the city renovated a building in a long-empty strip shopping center to house the new Dove Springs Multi-purpose Center. This serves as temporary quarters for both a recreation center and a branch of the Austin Public Library; plans are underway for each to construct its own building in the near future. Adjacent to the Multi-purpose Center are a neighborhood police center that focuses on prevention and positive outreach and an office of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. SoF served as a catalyst for these efforts, empowering and enabling local residents to accomplish their dreams.

DOVE SPRINGS COLLABORATION PROJECT

Another community development, this in the area of social services, is the Dove Springs Collaboration Project. It consists of eight agencies funded primarily by the City of Austin in 1994 to offer a variety of services for children from birth to age 18 and their families in southeast Austin. These agencies are Austin/Travis County Youth Services, CEDEN, Child Inc. (Head Start), Communities in Schools, Pathways (formerly Austin Wilderness Counseling), Roving Leader, St. Edward's University (Mentoring Program), and Teenage Parent Youth Council. Head Start and the Roving Leader program are components of the School of the Future; CEDEN's entrance into the community was based in large part on SoF efforts; and the SoF coordinator serves on the project's board. Though each program has a different target population and focus, all are committed to the same goal: to help produce healthy, nonabusive families who will be capable of helping their children avoid the serious problems that can occur during adolescence and succeed in school.

PERSPECTIVES ON COLLABORATION

Several elements are crucial to a successful collaborative effort: (1) the climate in which a process begins, (2) the processes for building trust and handling conflict, (3) the people involved, (4) the policies that support or inhibit efforts, and (5) the resources that enable efforts to continue.[1] The Austin School of the Future exemplifies how these elements can work.

The principals of Widen and Méndez believe in school-based services. From the beginning they have provided the positive and supportive climate that has enabled the School of the Future to develop. Principal Duncan further demonstrated her support initially by giving the SoF coordinator an office next to her own. Both Duncan and Perez have management styles that are based on trust and open communication, and they show that trust by encouraging staff members to try new approaches to dealing with problems and improving their schools. This approach also has helped make the teachers and staff receptive to the SoF.

The coordinator, for her part, has worked with the schools, local agencies, parents, and the community at large to bring needed services to Widen and Méndez without seeking power for herself or her program. She also has reached out to the community, collaborating with local leaders on broader issues than those of the SoF.

Spearheading the community's role has been Victor Aquiño, president of the Southeast Corner Alliance of Neighborhoods (SCAN), who has spoken at school board and city council meetings to inform Austin's leaders about the needs of Dove Springs' residents. He also serves as president of the Widen PTA and works with Rangel to obtain essential facilities and services for both the schools and the neighborhood.

But collaboration, for all its advantages, is not easy to carry out. It is

repetitious and time consuming, demands participation, and doesn't produce quick results. It requires patience, the building of trust, and the sharing of mutual goals if it is to produce a supportive network that enables all the players to participate and grow. Turfism often presents problems; so do different regulations, budget cycles, and program standards. These details and others must be resolved when services are brought together on a school campus.

As Milton McQuage of Child Inc. points out, "We try to have as much to do with other programs as possible. But it's expensive to collaborate; there's initial, up-front expense and the time involved in planning and holding meetings. It's cheaper and quicker to do everything yourself." Beyond that, he says, there are people who are not interested in collaboration until they can see a benefit to themselves. "People who wouldn't return our phone calls a few years back," he notes, "now say 'let's do lunch'."

None of the key players in the School of the Future would say that collaboration is easy. They would, however, point out the benefits.

• From Principal Lucy Duncan's perspective, "All School of the Future activities here at Widen bring parents into the school and help make them more comfortable." She talks to families casually at program meetings and in the halls, helping them feel less intimidated by the school and more likely to regard education in a positive light.

• Principal Mike Perez agrees, noting that with Head Start on the Méndez campus, "parents get to see and visit the school their children will attend in a few years, and the kids get to know it as a friendly place." In turn, these parents are more likely to impart a positive attitude about education to their children.

• The prekindergarten teachers, each busy with a class of 18 four-year-olds who have never been in school before, appreciate the help provided, directly and indirectly, by the SoF. This includes getting help for new parents by informing PAT when there is a new baby in a student's family or referring Spanish-speaking families to Cara y

Corazon; quick access to the Widen Health Center for wellness exams, immunizations, and testing for cognitive development; getting counseling for youngsters with behavioral problems; and having an aide in class, courtesy of Child Inc.

• Parents As Teachers staff find that Widen is being seen as part of the community even by families who don't have children there and that, through PAT, young parents are looking forward to the time when their children will start school.

• For CEDEN, a community-based program, the benefits of collaboration with SoF include access to the schools and inclusion on advisory boards of some of the school-based programs. In turn, the agency gives some of the SoF programs an additional resource for infants and parents in the neighborhood.

• Parents, although they may not be familiar with the SoF concept or, for that matter, even its name, are pleased with the many programs that are now being conducted for their children and themselves in the schools and with the increasing number of resources and amenities in the community.

Having a variety of resources readily available and accessible is a basic concept of the School of the Future. What the school administrators and service personnel are finding is that, by collaborating with one another, the health and social services brought to the Widen and Méndez campuses are able to have a greater impact on the community than they would individually. In effect, the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

A remarkable number of changes have taken place in Dove Springs since the day five years ago when someone documenting neighborhood services could list only "what wasn't there." Today the list is on the other side—many services are available to children on the grounds of Widen and Méndez schools; some of these, along with others, are available to the broader community.

As a catalyst, the School of the Future is fostering and strengthening a sense of community in Dove Springs. Through its presence and accomplishments it is making the area more visible and attractive to other efforts and increasing the potential for neighborhood improvement. Together, the SoF and community leaders are striving to build a safe learning environment and a stable community in which neighborhood children and their families can live and prosper.

An unusual aspect of the SoF is that no single service or group has tried to take over the project. Rather, this collaboration of schools, independent agencies, and concerned residents is a documented example that people can, with motivation and effort, work together in the best interests of a community. This is the essence of genuine community strength.

[1]Millea, S. Social Workers and School Health: Promoting Collaboration Between Systems and Disciplines. Presentation, Public Health Social Work Institute, Pittsburgh, April 24-26, 1994.

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